

May 13, 2014

The Honorable Ron Barber  
1029 Longworth House Office Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Paul Tonko  
2463 Rayburn House Office Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Barber and Representative Tonko:

On behalf of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), I am writing to thank you for the introduction of Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act (HR 4574). AOTA is the national professional association representing the interests of more than 140,000 occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, and students of occupational therapy.

The Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act includes a wide array of provisions to address critical issues in our mental health system. AOTA was particularly pleased that the legislation also included the Occupational Therapy Mental Health Act. We greatly appreciate the inclusion of this language, as it supports the role of occupational therapy in the provision of quality mental health services. Our history in this field traces back to the institutional settings in the early Twentieth Century and has since evolved to include multiple settings, including community behavioral health settings, hospitals, and school settings. Serious mental illness can have a devastating impact on the basic skills that are needed for day-to-day, independent functioning. The purpose of occupational therapy in mental health is to increase an individual's ability to live as independently as possible while engaging in meaningful and productive life roles.

The challenges our country faces in addressing the issue of mental illness are not easy ones. We want to thank you for your courage and leadership in addressing the mental health and substance use issues facing our country. AOTA is committed to working with you as HR 4574 moves forward and to help ensure Congressional action on these critical issues.

Sincerely,



Christina Metzler  
Chief Public Affairs Officer  
American Occupational Therapy Association